Imaan, Hadi get bail in BYC protest case

Lawyers' bodies demand police removal from high court surroundings

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday granted human rights activist and lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and her husband Hadi Ali Chattha pre-arrest bail in a case pertaining to a protest by the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) that dates back to July 2025 and resurfaced a day earlier.

The two had filed pre-arrest bail applications in the case. However, their bail pleas could not be taken up on an urgent basis on Tuesday while the couple struggled to avoid arrest.

The couple took refuge in the IHCBA president's office, where they spent the whole night, while a large number of police officials remained outside the premises.

During hearing on Wednesday, Justice Muhammad Azam Khan of the IHC took up the pre-arrest application and approved Mazari and Chattha's bail against surety bonds of Rs10,000 each.

Advocate Kamran Murtaza appeared on behalf of the petitioners, and a large number of lawyers and officials from the IHCBA were present in the courtroom in solidarity with the applicants.

Addressing the court, Murtaza said that this was the first time in the country's judicial history that a woman had to spend the night on court premises, adding that he personally felt responsible for what happened.

"If there had been an old case, they would have arrested her first," he said, adding that the petitioners had been appearing in various cases since July. "You are the custodian of the high court. You must ensure that no one is taken away from here," the defence counsel said.

He requested the court to grant protective bail and sought directions that no arrest should be made in any other case unless it was formally placed on record.

In response to request, Justice Khan observed, "I am passing orders only to the extent of the FIR that is before me."

Subsequently, Justice Khan granted protective bail to Mazari and Chattha and restrained police from arresting them in the case.

HRCP condemns misuse of Peca laws

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), meanwhile, expressed serious concern over continued harassment of Mazari and Chattha.

In a statement posted on X, the HRCP noted that the two "now face yet another allegedly fabricated first information report that was filed immediately after the Islamabad High Court reinstated their bail in a previous case on charges under the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (Peca), 2016" — a reference to the July 2025 case.

"We call on the authorities to halt the misuse of the Peca laws, respect orders of the superior judiciary and ensure protection of all citizens' fundamental rights of liberty, fair trial and freedom of expression," the statement said.

Police removal from IHC sought

Lawyers' bodies demanded the government to immediately remove police from the surroundings of the IHC, calling the deployment illegal and a violation of judicial sanctity.

Speaking at a press conference, IHC Bar Association President Syed Wajid Gilani said: "We respect all institutions, but our institution must also be respected."

He said police deployed around the IHC premises had no legal justification. Mr Gilani called upon authorities to treat Ms Mazari and Mr Chattha strictly in accordance with the law. "Pre-arrest bail is the legal right of every accused. Once a bail application is filed, no one has the right to harass them," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Islamabad District Bar Association President Naeem Gujjar said lawyers were facing harassment, detention, and restrictions on their movement. "Members are being detained repeatedly and are not being given access to the courts," he said.

Both bar leaders appealed to the prime minister, interior minister, law minister, and Field Marshal and Chief of Army Staff Asim Munir to intervene and ensure respect for judicial independence and the rule of law.

PRIME Minister Shehbaz Sharif, flanked by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, addresses a panel event in Davos, on Wednesday.—X/@GovtofPakistan

Export-led growth 'only way forward'

Continued from Page 1

progress on institutional reforms.

The statement said PM Shehbaz stressed Pakistan's commitment to fiscal discipline, revenue mobilisation, and sustainable development. The IMF official acknowledged Pakistan's reform efforts, stressing the importance of maintaining momentum to ensure long-term resilience.

PM Shehbaz also met with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa in Davos. Mustafa expressed gratitude for "Pakistan's consistent, principled and unwavering support for the Palestinian people," according to the Prime Minister's Office.

"Mustafa personally walked up to PM Shehbaz and introduced himself," the statement said.

PM Shehbaz is on a three-day visit to the Swiss town to lead a high-level delegation, including Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar.

"Pakistan's ongoing economic reform journey is unlocking profound opportunities, driven by a resilient and entrepreneurial workforce and significant potential across energy, agriculture, minerals, and emerging technologies," the premier wrote in a post on the social media platform X.

Meanwhile, Mr Dar inaugurated the Pathfinder Group's Pakistan Pavilion on the sidelines of the WEF Annual Meeting in Davos, according to a post by the Foreign Office on X.

The foreign minister lauded the initiative for showcasing the country's economic potential and highlighted the dynamism of its start-up sector.

He also held separate meetings with Canadian and Finnish counterparts. The Foreign Office said the ministers agreed to explore ways to enhance bilateral ties and discussed upscaling trade relations.

Lawmakers' asset law tweaks come under fire

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: The Awaam Pakistan Party has expressed grave concerns over the move to amend Section 137 of the Elections Act, 2017, describing it as an effort that did not serve the public interest but instead shielded parliamentarians from accountability.

The party's central spokesperson, Dr Zafar Mirza, announced that they would not accept any amendment that weakened asset declarations or provided elected representatives with a means to evade accountability. He said the law that applies to the public must apply equally to those who govern.

He noted that by the end of December 2025, 446 legislators, approximately 38 per cent of the total membership, had failed to submit their asset declarations.

"Even more alarming is the fact that the legislators who failed to comply are now preparing amendments to Section 137 to introduce leniency, extend deadlines and weaken the accountability process. This reinforces the perception that legislation is being crafted to protect personal interests rather than serve the public good," he said.

What is 'Board of Peace'?

Continued from Page 1

lawful governance, and secure enduring peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict". It further states that the body will "undertake such peace-building functions in accordance with international law".

Membership

States may only join if formally invited by the US president and will be represented by their head of state or government. Membership is limited to a maximum of three years, according to the charter. However, this restriction does not apply to countries that contribute more than $1bn in cash during the first year after the charter comes into force.

The board will hold voting sessions at least once a year, with each country allotted a single vote.

While decisions require a majority of members present and voting, they are also "subject to the approval of the chairman, who may also cast a vote in his capacity as chairman in the event of a tie".

Executive board

According to the White House, the executive board will oversee the implementation of the organisation's objectives. It will be chaired by Trump and comprise seven members:US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Trump's special negotiator Steve Witkoff, Trump's son-inlawJared Kushner, former British prime minister Tony Blair, US billionaire financier Marc Rowan, World Bank President Ajay Banga and Robert Gabriel, a close Trump associate serving on the US National Security Council.

Aside from Pakistan, dozens of governments and leaders have confirmed receiving invitations.

Among them are China, India, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney.

France, a longstanding US ally, has indicated it will not take part.

Trump responded by threatening to impose steep tariffs on French wine.

Invitations have also been confirmed by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Argentina's President Javier Milei.

Other countries to acknowledge invitations include Jordan, Brazil, Paraguay, Pakistan, as well as several states across Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Who is expected to join?

Countries ranging from Albania to Vietnam have signalled interest in becoming members.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orb n, a strong supporter of Trump within the European Union, has also agreed to join.

Canada has said it will participate but has clearly ruled out paying the $1bn required for permanent membership.

It remains uncertain whether other interested states, including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Morocco and Vietnam, would be willing to make the $1bn contribution for a permanent seat.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said it would be "very hard" to sit on a council alongside Russia, adding that diplomatic efforts were ongoing.

The charter states that it will come into force "upon expression of consent to be bound by three States".—Dawn Report/Agencies

Rotary provides $9.9m to WHO Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Rotary International has provided a grant of US$9.9 million to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Pakistan to support the vaccination of 27 million children against polio in high-risk districts.

The partnership will reinforce the operations of the Government of Pakistan-led Polio Eradication Initiative, which conducts multiple nationwide door-to-door campaigns and sub-national drives each year, reaching over 45 million children.

Rotary is a founding member of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) — a public-private partnership to eradicate polio worldwide led by national governments with six partners: WHO, Rotary International, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Unicef, Gates Foundation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Since the launch of Pakistan's Polio Eradication Initiative three decades ago, Pakistan has reduced polio cases by 99.8pc — from 20,000 cases in 1994 to 31 cases in 2025.

Globally, since 1988, the GPEI has brought down polio cases by 99.9pc. As of today, wild poliovirus type 1 remains endemic only in two countries: Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to a statement, to date, Rotary has contributed US$3 billion to global polio eradication efforts and nearly US$500 million to Pakistan, along with high-level advocacy and countless volunteer hours.

"Rotary's support is the best example of how a partnership can protect millions of lives. WHO extends its deepest appreciation to Rotary for its continuing support as a founding partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. Rotary's long-standing commitment is crucial in our journey towards a polio-free world," said WHO Representative in Pakistan Dr Luo Dapeng. The Rotary grant to WHO Pakistan is part of a larger US$14.9m contribution to overall polio eradication efforts in Pakistan.—Ikram Junaidi

'Unconditional' dialogue

Continued from Page 1

or protests. I will give them my consultation if they require it," Mr Gohar said.

He further said that if the government wished to "shake the hand" of the opposition, it should do so with both of its hands.

"The carrot and stick policy does not work. [Throwing] a punch with one hand and extending the other one does not work," he said.

Mr Gohar also said that PTI founder Imran was facing a multitude of cases, adding that the ex-premier's lawyers should be allowed to meet him.

He said that a PTI delegation had held a meeting with National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq and highlighted the fact that meetings with Imran were not being allowed.

Last month, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had reiterated his offer for talks with the opposition but also emphasised that dialogue between the two sides could only proceed on "legitimate matters".

However, PTI leader Barrister Ali Zafar had said that no dialogue could be held with the government until it allowed meetings with Imran.

Meanwhile, in his maiden speech as the National Assembly opposition leader on Monday, Achakzai had extended an olive branch to the government and offered "unconditional support" to empower Parliament.

CJP reviews progress on reforms

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: In line with his vision for a citizen-centric justice system, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi presided over the ninth interactive progress review meeting at the Supreme Court building on Wednesday.

The meeting assessed monthly progress under the Reform Action Plan during which the CJP issued directions on pending initiatives and key milestones aimed at modernising judicial processes, enhancing institutional efficiency, and strengthening public-facing services.

The meeting was attended by the president and secretary of the Supreme Court Bar Association, the SC registrar, IT Adviser Hamayun Zafar, senior officials of the SC, Federal Judicial Academy, law secretary, and Justice Commission of Pakistan representative.

The meeting examined measures to reduce lead time in case disposal, case categorisation, digitisation of records including financial receipts and expenditures, IT integration, audit mechanisms, and public facilitation initiatives. Updates on automation, including software enhancements, QR-coded certified copies, e-courts, capacity-building initiatives on data management and analytics, as well as ADR and mediation programmes, were also reviewed.

Pharmacists slam govt's hiring policy

By Muhammad Akbar Notezai

QUETTA: The Unemployed Pharmacists' Action Committee, Balochistan, has rejected the government's decision to announce only a limited number of vacancies for more than 2,000 unemployed pharmacists, terming it "equivalent to offering a pinch of cumin to a camel".

Addressing a press conference at the Quetta Press Club on Wednesday, UPAC General Secretary Qasim Aziz Mengal said the decision was unacceptable and demanded the creation of more posts along with transparent, merit-based recruitment.

He alleged that the appointment of pharmacists to BPS-17 posts through walk-in interviews was a non-transparent move, aimed at inducting favoured and recommended individuals. He claimed that merit did not exist in the health department and that the recruitment process lacked transparency.

He raised concerns over the absence and non-appointment of pharmacy departments in private hospitals. He also criticised the recent notification issued by the health department advertising doctors' and pharmacists' posts on a contract basis.

Pakistan jumps on Gaza peace board bandwagon

Continued from Page 1

intent to play an active role, saying it "looks forward continuing to play a constructive role as part of the Board of Peace for the achievement of these goals as well as to end the suffering of our Palestinian brothers and sisters."

The decision drew criticism at home, with critics questioning Pakistan's participation in an initiative driven by Washington and chaired by President Trump. Critics raised concerns over what they describe as a pay-to-play structure, arguing that financial contributions appear to translate into influence, undermining principles of equitable multilateralism.

Others recalled the description of initiative in international media, which described it as 'a bait and switch', contending that a body initially framed around the implementation of a Gaza-specific, UN-endorsed plan is being repurposed into a broader mechanism with an open-ended mandate. They warned that indications of an expanding scope could place the board in competition with existing UN institutions, weakening an already strained multilateral system.

'Strategic necessity'

Amid the criticism, a state institution circulated a background explainer to journalists defending the decision to join the board as a strategic necessity. The explainer described participation as "a pragmatic step for political solution of ongoing genocide in Gaza", undertaken alongside "multiple Muslim countries working collectively to safeguard Palestinian interests."

The explainer said Pakistan's inclusion reflected "recognition of Pakistan's heft and importance in global comity" and was consistent with its participation in multilateral forums in an increasingly polarised and fragmented world. It argued that Pakistan's ability to maintain working relations with major global powers gave it "the unique capacity to act as a bridge for peace".

Addressing calls for abstention, the explainer warned that "as geopolitical fault lines harden, neutrality becomes indistinguishable from irrelevance," adding that "portraying Pakistan as a bystander serves only those invested in paralysis".The explainer also drew a distinction between the 'Board of Peace' and any potential international security force for Gaza, stating that "equating Board of Peace with participation in ISF is therefore illogical and out of place," while reiterating that any such engagement would remain subject to Pakistan's national interest, a UN mandate and the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Bill for secrecy of lawmakers' assets sails through NA

Continued from Page 1

shared statistics showing that 850 people, including family members and doctors, had met the former prime minister.

Responding to points raised by PTI lawmaker Shahid Khatak regarding an alleged ban on meetings and claims of solitary confinement, the minister said that such a large number of meetings had not been allowed for prisoners in the past three decades. He also criticised PTI leaders for repeatedly questioning whether Imran Khan was alive.

Tallal Chaudhry further said the government would proceed with a military operation in certain parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including erstwhile Fata. He said implementation of the National Action Plan was ongoing in consultation with provincial governments and insisted that the KP government was fully on board.

"There will be no sympathy for terrorists, and action will be taken at all costs," he said while blaming the PTI-led provincial government for unrest in KP due to its failure to establish the Counter Terrorism Department despite ongoing militant activity.

18th Amendment controversy

Another highlight of the proceedings was renewed controversy over the 18th Amendment after comments by ministers sparked a heated debate on provincial autonomy. The issue resurfaced after Defence Minister Khawaja Asif's remarks and was further fuelled when Minister for Food Security Rana Tanvir Hussain questioned whether "everything was fine after the 18th Amendment", referring to a recent fire incident in Karachi.

PPP MNA Naveed Qamar reacted sharply, saying Khawaja Asif's comments should be seen as a government policy statement. He warned that any attempt to transfer municipal services to the Centre would undermine the federal structure. He criticised the defence minister for calling the 18th Amendment a "charade" and accused the government of weakening provincial autonomy.

He urged the government to focus on constitutional issues and public welfare instead of destabilising political moves.

PPP lawmaker Sehar Kamran asked Khawaja Asif to explain how the 18th Amendment was a drama, remarking that issuing an ordinance without the president's consent and signature was the real "drama". Senator Aliya Kamran of the JUI-F also termed criticism of the amendment inappropriate, recalling that it had been passed with the consent of the PML-N.

MQM's Hafeezuddin said there was no harm in discussing the 18th Amendment.

Law Minister Tarar clarified that such remarks should be viewed as personal opinions rather than official government policy.

Earlier, during question hour, the House was informed that unauthorised possession of railway land by government departments was being regularised through leases under the railway land policy. Parliamentary Secretary for Railways Usman Awaisi said an anti-encroachment drive had been launched to retrieve valuable land, adding that 781.84 acres of Pakistan Railways land had been recovered between July 2024 and June 2025.

Ikram Junaidi also contributed to this report

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